

The Need for American Hegemony

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Introduction

The American Idea becomes a commodity for export, maybe the only item of domestic manufacture that can't be replaced by cheap foreign knock-offs.¹

The world witnessed a vast shift in the polarity of geopolitics after the Cold War. The United States became the world's greatest hegemon with an unequalled ability to globally project cultural, political, economic, and military power in a manner not seen since the days of the Roman Empire. Coined the "unipolar moment" by syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer, the disparity of power between the U.S. and all other nations allows the U.S. to influence the world for the mutual benefit of all responsible states.² Unfortunately, the United States is increasingly forced to act unilaterally as a result of both foreign and domestic resentment to U.S. dominance and the rise of liberal internationalism. The United States must exercise benevolent global hegemony,³ unilaterally if necessary, to ensure its security and maintain global peace and prosperity.

Benevolent Nature

The fall of the Soviet Union ended a period of bipolarity and created an "ideological vacuum" in the absence of anti-communism.⁴ U.S. intervention against Soviet aggression in Europe was no longer necessary. Thus, the significance of future U.S. hegemony came into question.

America decided that its benignity would be extended to the rest of the world through the protection of Western interests and assurance of free trade. With the resurgence of worldwide terrorism, the U.S. eventually found itself as the sole guarantor of human rights and dignity for oppressed people. This new role benefitted the entire world.

In the 1990's, for example, the U.S. intervened militarily in Kosovo, Somalia, and the Middle East to protect innocent people from oppressive and tyrannical rulers. However, socialist contemporaries Spyros Sakellariopoulos and Panagiotis Sotiris argue that U.S. motives were selfish. They contend that the U.S. in fact sought to enhance "capitalist profitability" and "foreign investment."⁵ While this argument may be partially credible, the socialist elite often fails to recognize the U.S. guarantee of freedom extended to millions of Kosovars, Somalis, and Kuwaitis.

Certainly, the United States has been prudent in its application of force. Its decision to repulse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was directly linked to international dependence on free-flowing oil from the Middle East. The global market economy depends heavily on the accessibility of world commodities and consequently compels the U.S. to safeguard free and fair trade globally. Hence, the protection of American trade interests and free-market

capitalism around the world remains a primary focus of U.S. foreign policy. The National Security Strategy of the United States verifies this commitment. The National Security Strategy pledges to promote peace and economic prosperity through the exportation of democracy, market capitalism, and the use of force when necessary.⁶

U.S. Security and Global Peace and Prosperity

American benevolent hegemony indeed benefits the entire world. Robert Kagan, a well-known neoconservative, states "the truth is that the benevolent hegemony exercised by the United States is good for a vast portion of the world's population" and that to undermine U.S. hegemony "would cost many others around the world far more than it would cost Americans."⁷ In fact, billions of people worldwide live safe and prosper under the umbrella of U.S. military might and American-influenced global markets.⁸

Imagine the world without U.S. hegemony. Who would deter nations like North Korea, China, and Iran from attacking their neighbors? For 55 years, an American presence in South Korea has deterred North Korean belligerence. Across the East China Sea, the U.S. 7th Fleet discourages the People's Republic of China from using military power to force the annexation of the 60-year old democratic de-facto nation of Taiwan. Of course,

the American-led Multi-National Force - Iraq continues to ensure freedom and democracy in Iraq while daunting regional Iranian aggression.

Of course, American benevolence abroad arose from the wastelands of post-World War II Europe and Asia. During the Cold War, the U.S. found itself as the sole guarantor of freedom for numerous Asian and European countries threatened by Soviet aggression. America's ability to influence the world economy and maintain significant military presences in West Germany and Japan allowed its allies to prosper in relative safety.

Over time, American grand strategy of Soviet containment and Western economic prosperity made American hegemony not only palatable, but attractive to friendly nations. They understood that U.S. allies would be subjected to vast amounts of U.S. economic aid. That monetary aid ultimately created powerful economic competitors in Europe and Asia out of the ashes of World War II.

Furthermore, U.S. defense policy during the Cold War ensured U.S. security through the security of its allies. This policy guaranteed the peace and safety of democratic societies globally. Additionally, this benign U.S. hegemony was "augmented for a time by a monopoly of nuclear weapons and the capacity to deliver them."⁹ U.S. policy of nuclear deterrence, for example, dissuaded any Soviet invasion of western Europe.¹⁰

The U.S. continues today to identify its interests and national security with those of its allies. In fact, American prosperity, freedom, and security at home are made possible only by ensuring the same around the world.¹¹ Accordingly, the U.S. stays the course in Iraq and Afghanistan at the cost of thousands of American lives and hundreds of billions of dollars. This creates an enormous disparity between U.S. funding for Homeland Security and the Global War on Terror in what Robert Kagan accurately describes as "making good" on American "international commitments."¹² This clearly negates the socialist delusion of a selfish U.S. foreign policy.

Admittedly, the ultimate objective of U.S. hegemony is the advancement of American lives on the home front. No government intends its policies to cripple its nation's security and economy. However, U.S. policies are meant to also benefit its friends and allies.

Unfortunately, Americans begin to "take the fruits of their hegemonic power for granted"¹³ as lengthy prosperity turns into complacency. This results in American ignorance towards growing international resentment of U.S. dominance. It also facilitates the rise of liberal internationalist fantasies of a multipolar world "characterized by a balance among relative equals."¹⁴

An Alternative Perspective

The liberal internationalist school of thought is based on the concept of multilateralism,¹⁵ which became popular in the 1990's due to "an obsession with international legality." This resulted in the creation of liberal international bodies such as the European Union and World Trade Organization. Unfortunately, multilateral principles have become the mainstay of European politics over the last decade in response to U.S. hegemony. History, however, confirms multilateralism to be unsustainable and impractical.

Multilateralism

The idea of international approval to justify the morality of governmental decisions is mind-boggling. Consider a U.N. Security Council resolution to pose sanctions on another country. The approving nations will probably act in their own interests thereby making suspect any cause for agreement.¹⁶ The U.N. and E.U. were nonetheless founded on this way of thinking. However, these organizations were not Europe's earliest "utopian" dream of a "transnational economic era" characterized by a lack of borders, state sovereignty, and military power.¹⁷ The first ended abruptly with "the war to end all wars."¹⁸

Yet, liberal internationalists, like Professor Noam Chomsky of MIT, insist that a unipolar world dominated by the U.S. disregards U.N. principles concerning the mutual defense of

nations and precipitates a "divided" and "insecure" world.¹⁹ Thus, the multilateralist solution is not state sovereignty, but rather the interdependence of states, which consequently weakens the notion of the nation-state.²⁰ Multilateralists believe that peace and prosperity are achieved through international cooperation and the application of law. They argue that the United States' "do-it-alone" attitude, regarding multilateral treaties in particular, discounts the rule of international law and isolates the U.S. from the international community.²¹

While multilateralists strive to replace state sovereignty with international charters, they fail to recognize the infeasibility of a multipolar world. No other nation is currently capable or willing to assume equal responsibility for maintaining global peace and prosperity. This became apparent as European allies slashed their defense budgets and failed to take the lead in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, and Bosnia.²² Such was also the case at the end of the Cold War when European nations cut military spending to below two percent of their GDPs while they "cashed in on a sizeable peace dividend" paid in full by America.²³ Europe cannot maintain peace and prosperity with an underfunded military force.

Still, Europe demands "multilateral action through the U.N." and insists on equal say in solving global issues without providing equal funding. Alas, these are typical tactics of

weaker nations unwilling to carry their weight on the international stage, though they are eager to be "free riders" on a global "American pax."²⁴ They beg for U.S. aid and security during crisis only to resume their usual criticisms thereafter.²⁵

Frankly, most nations do not desire multipolarity. The reluctance of foreign powers to increase their world presence speaks to this end.²⁶ Consider the limited European contribution to the Global War on Terror. Europe's lack of participation creates a global need for American hegemony since the U.S. is willing to provide a last line of defense for many countries. In fact, American "unipolarity, managed benignly, is far more likely to keep the peace."²⁷ Of course, the concept of benignity is subjective.

Impossible Benignity

Felix Ciuta, a social sciences professor at the University College in London, argues that words like "benign" and "benevolent" are not hegemonic since the very nature of hegemony reflects the selfish interests of the hegemon.²⁸ Critics typically cite the Bush Doctrine²⁹ of preemption as proof of this argument. They contend, for example, that the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq violated Iraq's sovereignty under pretenses of WMD proliferation and human rights violations in order to secure U.S. interests in the region.³⁰ Furthermore, critics feel that preemptive war is a war crime³¹ since it

entails the use of "unrestrained, extra-legal violence."³² Thus, its application in the name of human rights and democracy mocks those very principles.³³

Admittedly, even truly benevolent motives do not always produce beneficent outcomes. The British Empire viewed itself as benevolent; however, its "benign" unilateral actions were often deemed malevolent by its colonies resulting in various independence movements.³⁴ From 1945 to 1997, British "benevolence" caused the disintegration of the empire as colonies worldwide broke ties with the English Crown and declared their independence.

However, America's benevolence is evidenced by its track record. The U.S. successfully mediated peace between nations on numerous occasions. For over 50 years, U.S. efforts diverted various clashes between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, prevented a second war in Korea,³⁵ and ensured an autonomous Taiwan. When a situation called for force, the application of U.S. military power was "limited in time and scope"³⁶ since the nature of American hegemony is ideological,³⁷ not territorial as it was with the Roman or British Empires. If not, would the U.S. be concerned with exit strategies in the Middle East as it was in Bosnia? America has never entertained delusions of a "One Thousand Year Reich" or a "New Soviet Man."³⁸ Instead,

America expends its own blood and treasure to extend hope and freedom to billions of people globally.

Conclusion

The world is safer and more prosperous because of U.S. hegemony. The free world enjoys unprecedented economic prosperity while starvation and poverty continue to decline. Furthermore, the "*amicus populi romani*,"³⁹ still call upon the U.S. during times of distress. They require U.S. hegemony for their own self-interests as well as to foster good relations with the world's superpower.⁴⁰ Therefore, the U.S. must exercise benevolent global hegemony, unilaterally if necessary, to ensure its security and maintain global peace and prosperity.

What are the alternatives? A Chinese or Russian hegemony would be unlikely to benefit the rest of the world. A multilateral coalition of nations proved to be ineffective and unsustainable. American isolationism would leave the world vulnerable to tyranny. Ultimately, the future of the world depends on American willingness to guarantee the freedom of others. To quote Ronald Reagan: "We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression – to preserve freedom and peace."⁴¹

Notes

1. Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 145.
2. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *The National Interest*, Winter 2002/03, 5.
3. Hegemony: preponderant influence or authority over others; the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group; *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, online ed., 2008, under the term "hegemony," URL: <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>>, accessed 15 December 2008.
4. Spyros Sakellaropoulos and Panagiotis Sotiris, "American Foreign Policy as Modern Imperialism: From Armed Humanitarianism to Preemptive War," *Science & Society* 72, no. 2 (2008): 222.
5. Sakellaropoulos and Sotiris, 220.
6. The National Security Strategy of the United States identifies two overarching pillars. The first pillar is the promotion of freedom, justice, and human dignity by working to end tyranny, promoting effective democracies, and extending prosperity through free and fair trade and smart development policies. The second pillar is the confrontation of current challenges by leading a growing community of democracies; U.S. President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2006, 1. Cited hereafter as *National Security Strategy*.
7. Robert Kagan, "The Benevolent Empire," *Foreign Policy*, summer 1998, 25.
8. Murphy, 65.
9. Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," 26.
10. Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," 27.
11. U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 3-7.
12. Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," 27.
13. William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75 (1996): 21.

14. Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," 29.

15. Multilateral: involving or participated in by more than two nations or parties; *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, online ed., 2008, under the term "multilateralism," URL: <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>>, accessed 15 December 2008.

16. Krauthammer, 11.

17. Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," 30.

18. Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," 30.

19. Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 11.

20. Krauthammer, 12.

21. Professor Philippe Sands describes the U.S. government's "go-it-alone" attitude by its discouraging dismissal of various international treaties. He states that the U.S. left the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the 1992 U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change claiming it was not universally applicable and would damage the U.S. economy. The administration also dismissed the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty despite harsh international criticism in order to pursue its "'Star Wars' missile defense program." He states that the administration's sudden departure from these treaties blindsided its allies leaving them unable to respond to the disparagement of their national medias, governments, and publics. He also criticizes the Clinton administration for failing to adopt the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in July 1988 thereby effectively siding with various members of the "Axis of Evil" and alienating its NATO allies who favored the statute. Philippe Sands, "American Unilateralism," *American Society of International Law Proceedings*, 16 March 2002, 86.

22. Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," 31.

23. Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review* (June 2002), URL: <<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview>>, accessed 2 December 2008.

24. Deepak Lal, "In Defense of Empires," in *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire*, ed. Andrew J. Bacevich (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 42-43.

25. In one particular example, Kuwait historically criticized U.S. involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. However, when the Iran-Iraq War threatened Kuwaiti neutrality in the late 1980's, Kuwait requested U.S. flags for its oil tankers. It again requested assistance when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. The U.S. answered both calls for help, but Kuwait nevertheless returned to its customary role in publicly denouncing U.S. influence in the region. Barry Rubin, "What is Right is in U.S. Interests," in *What Does the World Want from America?*, ed. Alexander T. J. Lennon (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 76-77.

26. Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," 31.

27. Krauthammer, 14.

28. Felix Ciuta, "What Are We Debating? IR Theory between Empire and the 'Responsible' Hegemon," *International Politics* 43 (2006): 182, 184.

29. The Bush Doctrine is a phrase used to describe the Bush Administration's controversial policy of preemptive war instituted following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Summarized in Chapter V of the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States, the Bush Doctrine justifies the United States' unilateral application of preemptive force to forestall hostile acts against the United States. Perceived threats described in the National Security Strategy include terrorists, rogue states, and the proliferation of WMD; U.S. President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, 13-16.

30. Mel Gurtov, *Superpower on Crusade: The Bush Doctrine in U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 41.

31. Chomsky, 12.

32. Stephen P. Rosen, "Imperial Choices," in *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire*, ed. Andrew J. Bacevich (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 224.

33. Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 30.

34. Bernard Porter, *Empire and Superempire: Britain, America and the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 177.

35. Krauthammer, 14.

36. Rosen in *The Imperial Tense*, 224.

37. William E. Odom, "American Hegemony: How to Use It, How to Lose It," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 151, no. 4 (2007): 404.

38. Krauthammer, 14.

39. Translates to "friends of the empire;" Peter Bender, "The New Rome," in *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire*, ed. Andrew J. Bacevich (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 88.

40. Krauthammer, 16.

41. Ronald Reagan, President of the United States, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security," address presented at the White House, Washington, D.C., 23 March 1983, URL: <http://reagan2020.us/speeches/Defense_and_Security.asp>, accessed 2 December 2008.

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